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ABSTRACT

In the past 10 years many countries have implemented large-scale reforms of their public educational systems. The origins of reform programs in four countries--Canada, the United States, England, and New Zealand--are presented here. The text focuses on four aspects of reform: (1) the sources of reforms as initially proposed by governments, the role of various actors and forces in originating reforms, and the assumptions about education and reform; (2) what happened to reforms between their initial proposal and their actual passage into law; (3) the steps taken to implement reforms and the model of implementation that was used; and (4) the available evidence as to the effects of reforms, with particular attention to what may be known about how the reforms have affected student outcomes and learning processes. Three areas that have been important in many reform efforts are discussed: centralization of curriculum, decentralization of management responsibility, and introduction of elements of a market system to education. Data sources for the study include original documents, such as government policy documents; secondary analysis; interviews with key respondents; and interaction with academic colleagues. The findings show that international developments are important, but so are national and local political traditions, all of which complicate reform efforts. (Contains 37 references.) (RJM)

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The Origins of Educational Reform: A Comparative Perspective

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The Origins of Educational Reform:

A Comparative Perspective [1]

The last decade has been characterized in many countries by large-scale reforms of public educational systems. (We do not use the term 'reform' as reflecting a judgment about the desirability of these changes, but only to reflect the language that the governments introducing these changes use.) In this paper we look at the origins of reform programs in four countries. Our interest is in the origins of and justifications for these reforms, and in particular in the role of ideology in the initiation and direction of particular reform programs. [2]

The work reported here is part of a multi-year study of education reform in four countries - Canada, the United States, England and New Zealand. In Canada we are focusing on provinces of Alberta and Manitoba - the former an early adopter of more substantial changes and the latter having a comparatively modest program of reforms. In the United States we are using Minnesota as our initial site because it was an early adopter of several important reforms. [3]

The project as a whole sets out to look at four aspects of reform in these settings: 1) Origins. Our focus here is on the sources of reforms as initially proposed by governments, the role of various actors and forces in originating reforms, and the assumptions about education and reform (explicit or implicit) contained in these proposals.

2) Approval. We are interested in what happened to reforms between their initial proposal and their actual passage into law or regulation in each jurisdiction, in the politics of the reforms, and in the factors that led to any changes between proposals and approval.

3) Implementation. We will be giving attention to the steps taken to implement reforms, the choice of 'policy levers', and the model of implementation, if any, that informed the reform process in each setting.

4) Effects. Our interest here is on the available evidence as to the effects, intended or otherwise, of reforms, with particular attention to what may be known about how the reforms have affected student outcomes and learning processes in schools.

As we will note later, reform programs have not been uniform across each jurisdiction, and there are quite different elements in different settings. However we are focusing attention in this paper on three areas that have been important in many reform efforts: 1) centralization of curriculum coupled with large-scale testing of students and evaluation of schools; 2) decentralization of management responsibility from intermediate bodies to individual schools, and 3) introducing elements of a market system to education (such as school choice or charter schools). Other aspects of reform that have been important in some settings, such as changes in teacher training and development, are not taken up here.

Data sources for the study include analysis of original documents (such as legislative debates, government policy documents, legislation, and position papers of non-governmental organizations), secondary analysis and scholarly literature, interviews with

key respondents in some of the jurisdictions, and interaction with academic colleagues in the various countries involved.[4] To this point we have relied more extensively on primary sources in Manitoba and Alberta, and more on secondary sources in the other three jurisdictions.

Origins of reform.

The term 'reform' can be used in a variety of ways.[5] For purposes of this paper we use it to mean programs of educational change that are government-directed and initiated based on an overtly political analysis (that is, one driven by the political apparatus of government rather than by educators or bureaucrats), and justified on the basis of the need for a very substantial break from current practice.

Each of these elements is a relatively recent feature. For much of the post-war period education policy in these countries was the subject of substantial consensus, and generally involved expansion and modernization along a set of lines broadly accepted by a coalition of educators, the public, and governments. However in the past decade or so (the starting point varies from country to country), education policy has become much less consensual, more a matter of conflict, and more overtly driven by the political agendas of particular governments (Lawton 1994; Court 1997; Macpherson, 1996; Mazzoni, 1991).

Not only have the politics of education changed in important ways, but the substance of the debate about education has also shifted in recent years. The rationale for education reform is increasingly couched in terms of economic needs, especially in regard to international competitiveness. Though economic justifications have always been

important in education (Krahn, 1996 provides a good discussion of this issue in regard to secondary schools and work), they are especially prominent in recent discussions. As part of the economic emphasis, business groups have played a very important role in shaping education policy in recent years (Whitty, 1989; Borman et al, 1993; Mazzoni, 1991). Business leaders have chaired commissions on education (such as Picot in New Zealand), have issued influential reports (such as the Minnesota Business Partnership or the Conference Board of Canada), and business practices have frequently been held up as examples for schools to emulate (such as Total Quality Management). A recent United States 'summit meeting' on education involved political and business leaders, but almost no representatives of the educational community (Good, 1997).

Schools also face more criticism than in past and the mood about education is less optimistic. Again, there has always been some unhappiness with schools - their all-encompassing mandate and idealistic purposes make this inevitable - but the criticism is more vociferous and more widespread than used to be the case. (Though it should be noted that public support for education, especially among parents, remains high in many countries, especially in comparison with public confidence in other institutions - see Livingstone, 1995.) One also finds in current reform agendas relatively less serious attention to issues of equity and relatively more focus on individual outcomes.[6] It is also notable that efforts to reform education are, for the first time in fifty years, accompanied by static or decreasing levels of real funding. Governments have had some success in convincing people that more money is not available and that tackling the problems of

education does not require infusions of new cash, but it is hard to think of any previous major educational reform that was not accompanied by substantial injections of money

The reasons for these political shifts are a matter of considerable debate.[7] One point of view is changes in education debate and policy are concomitant with factors such as rising unemployment and static or falling real incomes, declining public confidence in institutions of all kinds (e.g. Reid, 1996), a better educated and more demanding population, disillusionment with the results of the reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, an aging and more conservative population, and increasing political pluralism leading to more overtly conflictual politics (good discussions of these issues can be found in Giddens, 1994 and Mulgan, 1994). A quite different analysis focuses on organized efforts to reverse movements towards redistribution of power and income by those threatened by these changes (for example, Apple, 1990). These explanations are not mutually exclusive, nor can we assume that the dynamics were the same in each of the countries.

Origins of reform - a theoretical perspective

Although our interest here is in the origins of reform and the role of ideology, we do not assume that government policy is primarily a technical-rational, linear process. The public administration literature contains many theoretical analyses of government decision-making processes and their limitations (March & Olsen, 1989: Wilson, 1989). Some literature is specifically focused on the way political agendas are constructed. Kingdon (1984), for example, argues that a specific issue only becomes central when

there is the right combination of circumstances requiring, in his view, the confluence of a problem, a policy (or solution) and an appropriate political opportunity.

Discussions of the origins of reform can also occur at more than one level. One can look at the reasons for a particular government policy direction at a particular moment in time. (e.g. Mazzoni, 1993) Who were the key actors? What were the political stakes? Which interests were especially influential? What specific processes were important? Another approach is to root these particulars in a broader context. Some analysts focus on the extent to which education reform is an international phenomenon (e.g. Whitty, 1997; Fowler, 1995: Halpin & Troyna, 1995). Others look at changes in education in relation to changes in other areas of public policy, seeing education as only one instance of a much broader set of developments (e.g. Boston et al. 1996). Yet another approach is to look at reform within a single jurisdiction historically, trying to see how current developments grow out of the past (e.g. Lawton, 1992, 1994).

We take the view that all of these are relevant perspectives. Policy creation is a highly complex process. Immediate political factors are, in our view, very important in determining what happens in any given case. Governments are concerned with the immediate; with the definition of an issue and an attempt to address that issue. In that sense political issues are always particular. One of the most powerful factors defining a particular issue is people's sense of their own past and how that shapes what needs to be done and what is possible to do. At the same time, political jurisdictions are less and less isolated, so developments in one place do have an impact on others. And it seems to us

self-evident that developments in education are linked with and strongly influenced by developments in the larger sphere of public policy and social thought.

Nonetheless, policies are about ideas, and current education reforms are often criticized - and defended - as representing a particular intellectual perspective, often referred to by both supporters and critics as New Right or neo-conservative ideology (we will use the two terms interchangeably). A full discussion of the nature of these positions is beyond the scope of this paper (and is itself a subject of some controversy). Moreover, the New Right itself contains a variety of points of view, some of which are mutually inconsistent. However for our purposes we will characterize a New Right or neo-conservative view as involving three main beliefs:

- public institutions, including schools, are not effectively meeting their goals due largely to their capture by employees and unions;
- the unfettered market is the preferable form for almost all social activities;
- the role of government should be reduced in most areas of social and economic policy;

Ideology

Much of the literature on education reform makes use of the concept of ideology. Like most terminology around ideas, *ideology* has a variety of definitions and is used in many different ways. Donald and Hall (1986, p. ix-x) provide a definition that has been widely used.

> The term ideology is used to indicate the frameworks of thought which are used to explain, figure out, make sense of or give meaning to the social and political world... They define a discussive space of meaning which provides us with perspectives on the world, with particular orientations or frameworks within which we do our thinking. Without these frameworks we could not make sense of the world at all. But with them, our perceptions are inevitably structured in a particular direction by the very concepts we are using.

This definition shares with most others the notion that ideology is a framework of thinking about social and political matters - one that simultaneously allows us to see or understand certain things and, as the obverse of the same coin, prevents us from seeing other things.

The term 'ideology' often carries a normative meaning. For adherents of a particular view, ideology is the script of belief - thus the fierce battles within ideological communities over what may seem to outsiders very minor points of doctrine. Critics, on the other hand, may use the term 'ideological' as a pejorative, implying that those who are ideological are not thoughtful, or are blind to important realities. Here ideology is seen as the opposite of pragmatism. Many contemporary social theorists regard every position as in some sense ideological (Stone, 1988; Manzer, 1994). However, if every position is regarded *a priori* as ideological, the term may cease to be very useful as an analytic device; to paraphrase Wildavsky (1984)[8], if ideology is everything, then maybe it is nothing.

An important feature of the discussion of ideology is that it is at one and the same time described as a relatively coherent set of ideas that drive thought and action, and also

as being full of contradictions and inconsistencies. So, in contrast to the definition cited earlier, Apple (1990, p. 15) notes that "Ideologies [are] filled with contradictions. They are not coherent sets of beliefs. It is probably wrong to think of them as beliefs at all. They are instead sets of lived meanings, practices, and social relations that are often internally incoherent." And Billig et al (1988, p, 2) take a similar position: "In contrast to the cognitive psychologists, we stress the ideological nature of thought; in contrast to theorists of ideology, we stress the thoughtful nature of ideology." Ideology and thinking generally are full of dilemmas; ideology is never complete and unified, so individuals still have to think through what to do in any given situation.

The importance of ideology in determining policy is also a subject of considerable debate. Some analysts describe it as one of the central drivers of education policy. Manzer (1994, pp 6,9), for example, has produced a historical review of education policy in Canada that is framed by ideological concepts of liberalism and conservatism.

> Political ideas constitute meanings of politics and policies because they form the language through which people understand their place in the political world, and thence articulate their interests, conceive modes of associations with others in their political community, and devise courses of collective action... In judging public policies there are no criteria without ideological contexts.

Edelman (1988, p 10) argues that politics is almost entirely about ideology.

> Accounts of political issues...become devices for creating disparate assumptions and beliefs about the social and political world rather than factual statements. The

> very concept of 'fact' becomes irrelevant because every meaningful political object and person is an interpretation that reflects and perpetuates an ideology.

Critics, especially, may refer to reform proposals as ideologically motivated or driven. For example, Lawton (1994, p. 104) describes Conservative education policy in England by linking ideology with prejudice.

> Unfortunately, the legislation has been a mixture of attempts to enforce ideological prejudices, out-of-date traditions and then more legislation to patch up earlier over-hasty drafting.

Others, however, are more cautious in identifying ideology as a main determinant of policy, for several different reasons. Some commentators note the important differences of opinion within groups that are sometimes seen by opponents as homogeneous (see below). Political parties usually contain quite wide spectrums of opinion within themselves. Another set of analyses focus on the extent to which policy-making is dominated by immediate political practicalities.

> ...interpreting policy via a reading of a correspondence between ideological preferences and concrete proposals is a hazardous procedure, and on which may overlook the complexities, contingencies and competing interests which we believe are so much a part of the policy-making process. (Fitz & Halpin, 1991, p 135)

Analyses of bureaucratic functioning, especially those rooted in neo-institutionalist views, also stress the many factors other than ideas and intentions that affect policy making and policy implementation (March & Olsen, 1989; Wilson, 1989). The personalities and

motivations of individuals in key roles may be a vital determinant of policy. Actions of governments are to a very substantial degree influenced by their perceptions of the immediate political situation. The existence and strength of other political pressure groups can have a powerful impact of which ideas make it on to the agenda.

None of this necessarily means that ideology is unimportant, only that it is one of the factors operating in any given situation.

> Manzer (1994, p 50) summarizes effectively the problem analysts of ideology face.
>
> The interpretation of policy principles as elements of rival political ideologies is admittedly problematic. Where policy designs are the result of political compromise or historical evolution, participants in policy-making are unlikely to have articulated explicitly ideological justifications and explanations for the outcomes. Where policies have been explicitly chosen, the ideological assumptions of policy design may remain unstated and unexamined, perhaps for the good reason that everyone involved at the time simply took them for granted and got on with the practical details.

Manzer's analysis leads one to distinguish between ideology as espoused and ideology in use (paraphrasing again, this time from Argyris and Schon, 1978) [9] Using a (by no means simple or self-evident) contrast by between ideology and pragmatism, it is possible to consider educational reforms as justified more or less in explicitly ideological terms, and as being constituted by more or less explicitly ideological elements. Any combination of these possibilities could exist - that is, reform programs that are justified

ideologically and constituted ideologically, programs that are justified ideologically but are in practice more pragmatic, programs that are justified in pragmatic terms but are actually ideologically constituted, and programs that are neither justified nor constituted ideologically. In other words, the relationship between what is announced as intended and what actually occurs is a contingent one.

In this paper our focus is on the former aspect- the justification or rationale for reform, and we do not take up - though we recognize the importance of - the substantive nature of particular changes.

The five cases

We now turn to an examination of the five jurisdictions we are studying to look at the main factors that seem to have shaped these reform programs.

England and Wales (1979-1997)

The Thatcher-Major governments passed a series of laws that changed education in England and Wales dramatically, of which the most important were the Education Acts of 1988 and 1993. The English reforms have largely involved efforts to create more of a market-like organization in education, the main elements of which include:

- giving schools the right to opt out of the control of their local authority and be directly funded by government (grant maintained schools);

- requiring local authorities to pass on at least 85% of funding to schools on a formula basis;
- giving control over staffing, budget allocation, and many other aspects of school management to school governing bodies on which the majority of members are parents and community representatives rather than educators;
- giving parents choice as to what school their child would attend;
- requiring schools and local authorities to publish information about school programs and student achievement to help parents choose among schools;
- creating a national curriculum and a testing program with publication of school by school results of tests.

Almost all commentators agree that the reforms in England have been driven by an explicit ideology (the most complete discussion can be found in Lawton, 1994). Most analysts agree on at least two common features of that ideology:

- a belief in the superiority of market mechanisms over state provision of services, so that education will be improved by creating more competition among schools and more choice for parents;
- a strong distrust of the views of professional educators, so that the power of teachers and administrators must be reduced vis a vis parents on the one hand and the national government on the other.

The ideological view of English reform is not only in the eyes of academics; it is the framework used by the actors themselves. For example, in introducing a new

Education bill in the fall of 1996 (which died on the order paper when the 1997 election was called), the Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Shephard, had this to say:

> This Education Bill is the latest in a succession of education Bills that have, over the past 17 years, transformed our education system. The Bill will continue the drive for reform by carrying forward the basic principles in which we believe - principles that we have applied consistently in our efforts to raise standards in schools.
>
> First and foremost of those principles is the right of parents to choose the education that they want for their children, and to be able to choose, wherever possible, from a wide range of different types of good schools. That choice and the diversity of schools that we have promoted have been the strength of Conservative policies since 1979 (House of Commons debates, 11 Nov 1996).

And in regard to 'progressivism', Kenneth Baker, the Education Minister from 1986 to 1989, wrote in his autobiography (1993, p 168):

> Of all Whitehall Departments, the DES was among those with the strongest in-house ideology. There was a clear 1960s ethos and a very clear agenda... It was rooted in 'progressive' orthodoxies, in egalitarianism and in the comprehensive school system. It was devoutly anti-excellence, anti-selection, and anti-market.

Baker, of course, saw this position as a serious problem.

Lawton (1994, pp 98 ff) provides a good description of this part of Tory thinking as involving suspicion of all theory, especially within the field of sociology where it involves

issues of class, race and gender, psychology where it criticizes intelligence testing, selection, and streaming, and teacher education that promotes questioning of authority.

Various writers on the English reforms also note that the Conservative party is itself ideologically divided on many educational issues. Each commentator - for exapmle Lawton (1992), Dale (1989), and Jones (1989) - has a slightly different categorization of these divisions, though. [10] Of course all such divisions are strictly analytical devices for, as Whitty (1989) shows, individuals and groups shifted positions on particular issues and would not necessarily have identified themselves in any of these categories. However several commentators agree that there was a shift during the 1970s and 1980s which saw the advocates of markets become increasingly powerful at the expense, in many ways, of more traditional conservatives.

In this sense Gillian Shephard overstates the coherence of the Conservative program, which was more a matter of gradually working out or developing new elements as time went on rather than of a master-plan steadily implemented. For example, Grant Maintained schools were introduced in the 1988 Education Reform Act with the expectation that a very large number of schools would choose this option. When the expected pattern did not develop, additional provisions were made to encourage opting-out by providing GM schools with more funds, allowing them more room to select students, and other inducements. Similarly, the City Technology Colleges, announced with great fanfare in 1986, were much less successful than expected, resulting in other policy measures to try to achieve the desired result of more diverse provision of schools. The

personalities, predispositions and skills of particular ministers became quite important in this process, as was the attitude of Mrs Thatcher herself while she was Prime Minister (Dale, 1989).

Another important feature of reform under the Conservatives in England is the anti-intellectual quality of the arguments, what Jones (1989, p 9) calls "... a kind of agitational politics that relied for its effect, not on the findings of detailed research or academic study, but on the searching out of weakness in the positions of opponents, and in the sharp presentation of countervailing themes." This, of course, is consistent with the already-mentioned distrust of theory evidenced by the Conservatives.

Ideology, then, must be seen as an important component of the justification of education reform in England during the Conservative period. The overall language of policy direction was generally consistent and dominated by a few key intentions, though its specific manifestations depended on specific individuals and circumstances.

New Zealand (1987-1995)

The change in the New Zealand education system of interest to us dates from the re-election in 1987 of a Labour government. The Prime Minister, David Lange, also took on the Education portfolio. Shortly after the election the government created a Commission under the leadership of industrialist Brian Picot to suggest reforms to the management of education. The general recommendations of Picot were implemented beginning in 1989. They involved:

- Creating governing councils in each schools with a majority of elected parents and giving these boards control over budget, staffing, and school policy;
- Having each school develop a Charter - an agreement on nature and purpose - that would be approved by the Minister of Education and would be evaluated from time to time;
- Giving parents the choice of school that their child would attend.
- Eliminating most of the functions and staff of the Department of Education, moving them either to schools or to autonomous quasi-governmental agencies.

The New Zealand reforms are also generally viewed as being driven by an ideological agenda. However this agenda is different in important ways from the one operating in England. In New Zealand the changes in education were part of a much broader effort to revamp public services in line with a particular view of the state role. This vision is described as arising primarily in the New Zealand Treasury Department. It involved a unified attempt to apply some well developed theoretical concepts - notably agency theory, transaction-cost analysis, and what is known as the 'New Managerialism' to the full range of public services in New Zealand (Boston et al., 1996). All of these views are rooted in a limited concept of the state and a belief that self-interest is a paramount factor best controlled through specified contractual and managerial relationships. In this sense they are consistent with many aspects of New Right thinking. Boston et al (1996, p

3) describe the process : "...its conceptual rigour and intellectual coherence... [were] part of a carefully crafted, integrated, and mutually reinforcing reform agenda." The nature of the education system itself was a relatively minor factor.

Why these reforms happened as and when they did is, not surprisingly, a subject of debate. Boston et al (1996, p 28) comment:

> Exactly why the various theories and approaches... were embraced with such enthusiasm in New Zealand is a fascinating question. Clearly, part of the answer lies in the gathering together of a group of reform-minded policy analysts in the Treasury, their familiarity with the new institutional economics and public choice, and their sustained efforts to apply this literature to the problems of governance in the public sector. Of course, these efforts might well have been in vain had it not been for the openness of senior ministers to the Treasury's proposals and their willingness to implement them, notwithstanding the political risks involved.

Some commentators (Dale & Ozga, 1993; Whitty,1997) argue that there was no strong demand for education reform in New Zealand at that time, but others take the view that there was a growing sense in the early 1980s, embodied in several national reports, that the system was too centralized and too bureaucratic (Macpherson, 1989; Bennett, 1994)

Again unlike England, the New Zealand reforms were designed and implemented in a very short time. For example, the education legislation was passed in 1989, less than two years after the election. Although there have been amendments, some of them

consequential, since then, one sees in New Zealand much less of the gradual working out of a set of ideas that occurred in England. The 1987-89 design is still essentially in place.

That the reform program was implemented quickly does not suggest an absence of conflict. Writers on the New Zealand experience remark on the disputes within the program - between the Treasury view fixed on a much smaller state sector through the application of market and user-pay principles and the concerns about equity and community that were very important features of the Picot Report (e.g. Peters, 1995). The consensus of opinion is that Picot's recommendations were altered significantly before implementation to be much closer to the contractualist view favoured by the Treasury and the powerful State Services Commission, with much less attention to equity issues and a much smaller role for local communities.

To summarize, ideology played a key role in the rhetoric of reform in New Zealand, but it was less an ideology of education than one of state provision generally, and one driven by a relatively coherent and unified set of principles.

Canada

We include two Canadian provinces in this discussion - Alberta and Manitoba.

Alberta (1994-1997)

Alberta announced a major series of changes in education in January of 1994 as part of the beginning of a new session of the legislature immediately following the re-election of the Conservative government, but with a new leader - Ralph Klein - who was more

strongly committed than the previous leader to a program of reduction of government spending and debt.

The Alberta announcement involved:

- a 12% cut in education spending over three years, including roll-backs of teachers' salaries;
- elimination of local property taxation to support education, with all funds being provided by the Province;
- a reduction in the number of school districts from 141 to 60;
- the authorization of a limited number of charter schools;
- increased capacity for parents to school the school their child attended;

Many of these changes in Alberta were implemented via legislation, with an important set of amendments to the Education Act passed in the spring of 1994. However most of the Alberta program - with the exception of the large cuts in spending and the advent of charter schools - had been presaged by earlier developments. Alberta had always been one of the provinces with the most active approach to education policy; the province had a long record of launching significant policy initiatives with substantial direction by the provincial Department of Education. Alberta had also had an extensive program of student testing by Canadian standards and had increased this program significantly in the 1980s (McEwen, 1995). In regard to school districts, several moves had been made before 1994 to reduce their number; the previous year a number of districts that did not in fact operate any schools (these were very small districts whose students

were all accommodated in schools run by adjacent districts) were abolished. Alberta, like most other provinces, had also been making efforts to expand the influence of parents in school governance, and even in the 1994 program the parent role remained advisory only.

The 1994 program was largely embodied in an education bill introduced in the legislature in the spring of 1994. The legislative debate on the proposals had few references to ideological views. The reforms were generally not justified by government speakers on the basis of any theory of education improvement. Instead, the Minister, Halvar Jonson, spoke often about the extensive process of public consultation that had gone into the proposals and suggested they embodied a majority or consensus view of Albertans. He described the reforms as "designed to focus resources on students in the classroom, to ensure more decision-making at the school level, to lower administrative costs, and to put into place a fair system of funding education" (Alberta Hansard, April 12, 1994). Various government speakers on the bill referred continually to the vital importance of education to the future of the province, justifying the cut in expenditure on the basis of fighting the Provincial deficit and noting that education spending had been reduced considerably less than many other areas. On another occasion, debating the spending estimates of his Department, Jonson spoke about the reforms as involving "direction from the top, strong direction in terms of standards and in terms of core curriculum but also that the maximum flexibility is left at the delivery point, the school level, the student level, the community level to meet those standards, to meet those goals in the most effective and locally based way possible." (Alberta Hansard, March 30, 1994).

Although parent choice and charter schools were part of the package, neither element drew much debate nor were they justified in terms of a theory of markets. In fact, only one speaker in the entire debate - another Government minister - made deliberate reference to choice and competition as being desirable foundations for education policy. The Liberal opposition attacked the bill primarily on its funding provisions, arguing that they constituted a massive shift of power from local districts to the provincial government. Liberal speakers consistently suggested that they were attracted to the idea of charter schools, though they had concerns about the details of implementation. [11]

Rather than representing a sharp break with the past, as in England or New Zealand, the Alberta reforms were largely a continuation of policy patterns. The government did not defend them as a dramatically new direction, and did not link them to a theory of public policy.

Manitoba (1994-1997)

Manitoba has generally had an even more gradualist approach to education change than Alberta. The present Conservative government, which first took office in May, 1988, made few significant moves in education in its first several years. A commission was created to consider reform to the Public Schools Act. This commission held extensive public hearings and reported in 1993, but none of its recommendations was officially accepted or implemented.

Manitoba also created a Commission to review school district boundaries. That Commission reported in 1994 with a recommendation to reduce the number of school districts from 60 to 21. However after a period of study, the Government announced in 1996 that it would not act on those recommendations and that school district boundaries would remain largely unchanged. This decision differs from action in almost all other provinces to reduce the number of school districts, with the most drastic example in New Brunswick, where local school districts have been entirely eliminated (Young & Levin, in press).

The main package of education reforms in Manitoba in recent years was announced in July, 1994 by Education Minister Clayton Manness, and was called *New Directions*. The *New Directions* document included six major planks:

- a definition of essential learning embodied in a prescribed curriculum with a reduced number of options for students;
- an increased program of student testing;
- a requirement for each school to have a development plan;
- creation of advisory councils to provide more parent and community input;
- parental choice of the school children would attend;
- greater use of distance education and technology in schools;
- changes in teacher education.

Some of these, such as the curriculum and testing proposals were relatively well defined in the document. Others, such as the changes in teacher education, were expressed in quite

general terms. The discussion of essential learnings took 10 pages of the 34 page document; the discussion of parental and community involvement occupied four pages, and teacher education took a single page.

Although the Manitoba changes have been proceeding since 1994, rather little of the program has been legislated, and the legislative provisions came much later than the announcement of the program. In part this was because a 1994 bill died when a general election was called in the spring of 1995. However this bill only addressed a couple of the New Directions issues - most notably the creation of advisory councils for schools. These were eventually legislated in 1995, and provisions allowing school choice were only passed early in 1997. Instead of legislation, Manitoba issued a series of policy documents that amplified various aspects of the proposals and has used various forms of ministerial regulation and policy direction.

Given weak previous efforts toward change in education, the 1994 Manitoba changes clearly owed much to the Minister of the day, Clayton Manness. Manness had previously been Finance Minister, and was one of the most powerful members of the Cabinet. He had a reputation as an independent thinker and as being quite conservative, especially on social issues. Accordingly, he was in position to formulate a program of reform and to deliver on it. Unlike Alberta, where the provincial Department of Education was a strong organization with a large professional staff, Manitoba had cut the size of its Department dramatically over the previous few years and had a very small policy unit. Once the reforms were announced, Manness was able to get additional funding from

Cabinet to add staff in key areas, but there was a strong sense that the main elements of the 1994 program had his personal stamp, presumably with some fine-tuning and smoothing from officials. (Manness did not run in the 1995 election, resulting in a new Minister.)

The official rationale for changes in Manitoba was similar to that in Alberta in that the reforms were couched in what was called "common-sense terms" rather than in terms of a clear ideological position. The New Directions document said nothing about markets or private sector efficiency. It talked instead of ways of improving standards in light of economic and social needs, and it made much reference to the importance of balancing provincial direction with local community input. Although school advisory councils were mandated, they were given no significant powers. The idea of parent choice of schools received only a minor mention, and was described as "parental choice, within limits..." (New Direction, p 28). The document also suggested that the proposals were the product of substantial consultation, especially with parents. As in Alberta, the implication was that the proposals represented the public will. The Opposition in Manitoba - the New Democratic Party - made attempts to tie the Conservative program to a neo-conservative view, and the government was, at the same time, introducing other measures that did reflect this stance - such as privatizing a number of previously-public services, and, in the education sector, reducing funding and requiring employees to take days off without pay . These changes tended to be justified in terms of fiscal requirements and efficiencies. However the government's own language on education, in its documents and in the legislature, did not use the terminology of competition, choice, or markets. As in Alberta,

the Manitoba reforms represented a significant degree of continuity with previous policy and practice.

United States - Minnesota (1984-1996)

It is more difficult in Minnesota than in any of the other jurisdictions to locate a precise starting point for reform, partly because Minnesota, like many other states, has had an unending series of reforms and changes over the last fifteen or so years. Minnesota is generally regarded as a relatively liberal state and tends to have a Democrat majority in its legislature. However in 1985, in the wake of the national report, *A Nation at Risk*, Minnesota Democratic Governor Rudy Perpich outlined a series of proposals, which he called *Access to Excellence*. Over the next three years the Minnesota legislature passed a number of measures that grew out of Perpich's plan, involving:

- open boundaries, allowing students to attend any school in the state;
- a post-secondary options program that allowed students in the last two years of high school to move directly to a college or university if they were admitted, and to take their state grant monies to the post-secondary institution.

In 1991 Minnesota, with Republican Governor Arne Carlson, also introduced the first program of charter schools in the United States. Although the latter occurred under a different governor and in a different political context, it is in many ways an extension of the 1980s changes.

Understanding the different nature of reform in the United States requires attention to the very important differences in political system from the other cases, all of which involve parliamentary governments. In the parliamentary system, a government with a clear majority has the ability to implement almost any program it wishes if it is determined enough. The US legislative system, on the other hand, separates the executive branch from the legislative branch. Voting on party lines cannot be strictly enforced under these conditions, so a new coalition has to be put together on every legislative issue. Many states have both a house of representatives and a Senate. So there are three potential sources of policy and legislative initiative, and no guarantee that all of them will be dominated by the same political party, or that there will be anything like a common view of policy needs even if the same party is in charge.

Under these circumstances it is much more difficult to put together and implement a coherent set of policy proposals. Rudy Perpich's initial proposals for open enrolment were defeated in the legislature in 1985, while the post-secondary option program, which was not part of Perpich's plan, was eventually passed largely through the support of Republican state senate majority leader Connie Levi , although Perpich was a powerful factor in moving the bills through (Mazzoni, 1991). Open enrolment was revived and passed in 1988, after Perpich's re-election. On the other hand, Governor Carlson was not a primary mover behind the 1991 charter schools initiative, which was sponsored by some influential legislators and what Mazzoni calls external "policy entrepreneurs".

Another important feature of education policy-making is that for many US states, education is by far the largest item of expenditure and therefore of policy attention. In Canadian provinces, of course, health care is a larger expenditure and larger political concern than education, and other areas such as social services are also very significant.

The result in many US states is an unending series of education reform proposals as politicians from various parts of the system try to build attention for themselves and support for their positions. Education reform is also substantially influenced in many states, including Minnesota, by lobby groups, and especially in recent years business lobbies. Minnesota has witnessed a fair amount of this phenomenon; Mazzoni's twenty year chronology of education policy-making lists about twenty major initiatives in that time. But a look at the record in some other states, such as North Carolina (Keedy & Freeman, 1997) which had four very different reform programs between 1984 and 1995, or South Carolina (Ginsberg, 1995), which had three between 1984 and 1991, is even more dramatic. In comparison, Britain's record of thirteen Acts in 15 years (Lawton, 1994), all of them at least partly consistent with previous plans and several of them relatively minor, seem almost quiescent.

Although Minnesota has not had quite the same degree of sudden policy shifts and reversals, it is subject to some of the same vicissitudes. For example, the St Paul Pioneer newspaper reported on Aug 12, 1988, that Governor Perpich was "seeking to put his personal stamp on education policy, taking the reins of a national education group ... and using the position as a soapbox to urge other states to adopt his own pet reform." (open

enrolment). Seven years later (Dec 8, 1995) the same paper reported: "Hoping to cultivate national support for his drive to overhaul education, Gov Arne Carlson made his pitch in Washington... for school choice and competition as the salvation for America's underachieving students".

In the United States as a whole, ideological advocates of reforms such as school choice and charter schools have been very influential. However the Minnesota evidence does not fit the national picture very well. Perpich's initial reform proposals were doubtless influenced by the general climate of ferment in education policy in the United States after the release of *A Nation at Risk*, but whereas other states focused on toughening high school graduation requirements, adopting competency-based programs, or other mandates, Minnesota took quite a different course. Open enrolment was adopted in Minnesota well before many other states considered such a move. Post-secondary options has not been widely copied by other states. And the charter school movement in Minnesota was promoted extensively by advocates, notably Joe Nathan and Ted Kolderie, whose position on the issue was liberal rather than neo-conservative - who had strong concerns for choice as an equity vehicle. The climate of opinion of the day no doubt helped shape the kinds of options that could even be considered as politically viable, but in Minnesota reform proposals seem to have been much more a matter of what could be worked through political coalitions than the result of the kind of a priori commitment so evident in England and New Zealand.

Discussion

Our analysis suggests that ideology played very different roles in the origins and justification of education reform in each of the settings we have considered. In Britain and New Zealand the reform programs were driven - and publicly explained as being driven - by a set of beliefs about education and public policy. These were at the forefront of official statements and legislation. In the North American settings, on the other hand, the rhetoric of reform hinged much less on appeals to a program, and much more on appeals to what the public was said to want (e g more testing in Manitoba or Alberta; open enrolment in Minnesota) or on pragmatic explanations of what was necessary (e g cuts in funding).

In making this claim we do not suggest that ideology was of no consequence in the latter jurisdictions. As noted earlier, ideology may be a powerful driver of policy even if it is an unstated one. Ideological views shape the range of options that are even considered to be possible, and the general prevalence of neo-conservative policies in the industrialized world has certainly influenced the agenda in every country even where official documents and legislative debates are not framed in those terms. In no setting were reforms primarily organized around ideas inconsistent with the dominant set of current views about education - the importance of parental involvement and choice, the need for higher standards, the requirement for testing and reporting of student achievement, the desirability of reducing bureaucracy and decentralizing authority. No jurisdiction, for example, made reductions in poverty an important policy plank, even though child poverty rates are very high in several of the jurisdictions and are known to have very powerful effects on school outcomes

(Levin, 1995). References to equity concerns are not absent in the reform proposals (with the possible exception of England, where they are very muted indeed), but they are much less central than was the case ten or fifteen years earlier.

In no setting, however, was ideology the only determinant of policy. In New Zealand the Treasury agenda was largely but not fully implemented. In England there have been ongoing compromises between various strands of conservative thinking. None of the jurisdictions has actually implemented a full market version of education. All retain strong elements of state control and regulation.[12]

Why was ideology more important in some settings than others, especially since ideas did travel across the settings? American privatization advocates Chubb and Moe spoke extensively in England; New Zealand's Roger Douglas, finance minister during the reforms, was a frequent visitor to the United States and Canada. Considerable attention was paid in the US to the changes in England and New Zealand. And events in Canada are always influenced by developments in the United States.

We suggest two main factors that shape the role of ideology in particular settings: political context and culture, and the actions of specific actors.

Political context shapes agenda-setting in a number of ways. We have already noted the ability of majority governments in parliamentary systems to implement programs even against very substantial opposition and the quite different pattern in the United States because of their form of government. But majority governments do not always act in this way, which is where individual personalities become critical. Margaret Thatcher's

Conservative government was of a very different order than that led by a few years earlier by her predecessor, Edward Heath. Thatcher had a much stronger view of what she wanted to do and was willing to be extremely tough to meet her objectives. Long-standing traditions of consultation were swept away by a leader determined to act. Over time her entire Cabinet became much more committed to the kinds of market solutions that Thatcher herself faced (Lawton, 1994).

Similarly, Ralph Klein's government, elected on a promise to cut spending and debt, rode out strident opposition in implementing their program in 1994 and 1995. Manitoba premier Gary Filmon, on the other hand, has for much of his tenure tried to avoid the politics of confrontation. This may be partly due to the Conservatives' having had a minority government from 1988 to 1990, and a very thin majority until 1995. Changes in Minnesota were certainly affected by the larger climate of ideas about education in the US, but the proposals on open enrolment were closely associated with Governor Perpich and might not have passed even when they did had he not strongly supported them. In New Zealand the confluence of a determined staff in the Treasury, a receptive group of ministers, and an economic crisis that seemed to require drastic action allowed a particular set of ideas to become policy.

Conclusion

This preliminary discussion of the origins of reform and the role of ideology makes it clear that these issues are not simple. International developments and dominant discourses are important, but so are national and local political traditions as well as more or

less accidental circumstances, such as the perdispositions of people in particular positions. The kind of comparative analysis we are undertaking in this project will, we hope, help us think more clearly about the way that policy issues develop.

Notes

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2. Because this paper is the first to emerge from this project, which is still in its early stages, a number of important issues are either omitted or dealt with very superficially; we try to indicate many of these through the use of endnotes.

3. Differences in the constitutional structure of states are an important issue largely unexamined here. New Zealand is a unitary state; Britain is largely unitary, but Scotland has important differences from England and Wales. The United States if federal, but with the federal government playing an important role in education and with many local districts more important than state governments in some states. Canada is a federal state in which provinces are very powerful educationally but the federal government has only a minor role. Much more could be said about the importance of these differences.

4. We note here two features of the project that we regard as innovative: 1) extensive use of the World Wide Web as a source of data (for example Hansards of various jurisdictions are available on the Web, as are many government policy documents), and 2) an ongoing

dialogue with colleagues in the various jurisdictions (being carried on largely by e-mail) in which we compare our ideas, findings and data sources with those expert in each setting.

5. As noted earlier, the whole concept of 'reform' requires further consideration in a future paper.

6. The role of equity concerns within the various reform programs is also an important issue that is not discussed here in any detail.

7. The question of why particular political views arise at a particular time and place is a thorny one that we only foreshadow here.

8. Wildavsky's famous remark is about planning.

9. Their use of the phrase was in reference to values, drawing attention to the important difference between what people say they value and what their behaviour seems to indicate.

10. Lawton (1992) describes four categories: privatizers, minimalists, pluralists and comprehensive planners. Dale (1989) has five: industrial trainers, Old Tories, populists, moral entrepreneurs, and privatizers. Jones (1989) has three groups: traditionalists, market advocates, and modernizers.

11. The origins of and reasons for the inclusion of the charter school provision still need to be traced. Alberta is home to one of the country's most prominent spokespersons for charter schools and other forms of market-driven education, Dr Joe Freedman of Red Deer. The legislative debate in Alberta shows that Premier Klein was quite vague as to the nature of and reasons for the charter school provision.

12. We do not take up in this paper the issue of whether neo-conservative policies are

consistent with popular desires. There are, in our view, substantial grounds for believing that despite enormous efforts to popularize these views, many people, especially parents of school-age children, are far from sympathetic to them.

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